

WHAT MAKES THIS PLACE SPECIAL?

“The town itself is perhaps the dearest place to live in, in all New England...nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses, parks and gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford. Whence came they?....Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. One and all, they were harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea....”

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Description of the Park

New Bedford Whaling NHP, outlined on the accompanying map, encompasses 34 acres spread over 13 city blocks, including the New Bedford Historic District, a national historic landmark district. The schooner Ernestina, a national historic landmark berthed at State Pier on the waterfront, is also considered, by virtue of the enabling legislation, to be within the park.

The park boundary embraces more than 70 properties, most of which are historic structures in private ownership. Some are owned and managed by other government agencies, such as the city-owned Elm Street Garage and the Custom House, federally owned and managed by the General Services Administration. The Ernestina, owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is under the management of the Schooner Ernestina Commission in the state's Department of Environmental Management.

The National Park Service is also authorized to assist in interpreting and preserving a number of sites integral to the park but outside its boundary. Named in the legislation, these sites include the southwest corner of State Pier, Waterfront Park (located south of State Pier), the Wharfinger Building, and the Bourne Counting House, all on the waterfront, and the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum.

The waterfront properties are located within the designated port area (DPA) and are subject to local and state land-use regulations, including specific DPA provisions intended to preserve and promote maritime industries. State Pier and Waterfront Park are owned and maintained by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The U.S. Coast Guard berths at State Pier, which also supports warehouses and a city-operated freight ferry terminal. The city's Office of Marketing and Tourism manages the Wharfinger Building as a waterfront visitor center. The Bourne Counting House is a privately owned structure within the Merrill's Wharf Historic District.

Located away from the waterfront in a quiet residential area, the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum offers visitors insights into domestic life in historic New Bedford. Owned by a non-profit organization of the same name, this property within the County Street Historic District is about one-half mile from the National Park Service's visitor orientation center.

Park Significance

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park commemorates the city of New Bedford's heritage as the world's preeminent whaling port during the

19th century. It is the only national park unit that focuses on the whaling industry's historic role in American and world culture. An extensive assemblage of cultural resources—cultural landscapes, historic buildings, museum collections, and archives—preserves this history and collectively gives form to the stories of this remarkable era.

Whaling, a leading 19th-century enterprise, contributed to America's economic and political vitality, both domestically and abroad. A complex business network of maritime industries operated by whaling merchants in New Bedford supported the industry. The cultural diversity of the whaling fleet's crewmembers enriched New Bedford with a cosmopolitan influence that continues today.

The park was created to preserve and interpret New Bedford's whaling legacy—its districts, structures, and artifacts—and its related social and economic themes for public benefit and inspiration. The park's enabling legislation, Section 511 of P.L. 104-333, the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, as amended, appears in Appendix A.

Park Mission Statement

A park mission statement is a foundational affirmation of purpose that guides the management of each unit of the national park system. The mission statement for New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is grounded in language in the park's enabling legislation describing its purpose.

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park helps to preserve, protect, and interpret certain districts, structures, and

artifacts located in New Bedford, Massachusetts, that are associated with the history of whaling and related social, economic, and environmental themes for the benefit and inspiration of this and future generations. These efforts will be undertaken in partnership with the city of New Bedford, local and regional institutions, and the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska.

Park Mission Goals

Park mission goals are based on the park's mission and significance statements. They serve as broad guiding principles for park programs and for setting priorities. More specific statements for interpretation, resource protection, and park operations may be developed later from park mission goals. The mission goals for New Bedford Whaling NHP are as follows:

- Through partnerships with local, regional, and national institutions, organizations, and communities, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park supports the preservation of the historic landscapes, structures, and museum and archival collections in New Bedford that are associated with the history of whaling.
- The park contributes to the accumulation of knowledge and understanding of historic resources related to the social, economic, and environmental history of whaling and their associated themes, and fosters the stewardship of these resources through a network of private and public partners.

- New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park collaborates with a wide range of institutions within the City of New Bedford and beyond to promote the delivery of high-quality, comprehensive, interpretive, cultural, and educational programming to the general public.
- At New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park visitors understand the global dimensions of the city's whaling industry and maritime trades (past, present, and future), including their social, economic, and environmental history, the diversity of cultures associated with the industry, and its relationship to arctic exploration and Native Alaskan cultures.
- Visitor pathways to destinations within the city are safe and easy to navigate. Virtual pathways guide visitors to well-designed and -developed destinations on the Internet that are easy to find and use.
- The park and its partners achieve these goals in a flexible, cost-effective, and responsive manner.
- The National Park Service recognizes that New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is a source of community identity and pride and that positive, local participation in support of the park will yield success. New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park fosters a climate in which community initiatives and collaborations are encouraged.

Park Interpretive Themes

The park's enabling legislation clearly states that the history of American whaling and its economic, social, and environmental impacts are the primary themes for park interpretation at New Bedford. The

complexity of these primary themes prompted development of a number of theme statements that describe more completely the scope and depth of American whaling history. Dr. Mary Malloy of the Sea Education Association prepared the theme statements in consultation with park staff and planning team members, and the park's institutional partners and NPS historians and interpretive specialists have reviewed them. The park interpretive themes are as follows:

- New Bedford's geographic location influenced its development into the world's foremost whaling port in the 19th century.
- Whales provided important and valuable products, and the hunt for them fostered the development of highly specialized technologies and supported the economic base of New Bedford and the nation.
- The nature of a whaling voyage, requiring long separation from home and family, contributed to the development of unique cultures on shipboard and ashore.
- In pursuit of whales, New Bedford's fleet traveled the world's oceans and brought large numbers of Americans into contact with other cultures, including the native people of northern Alaska; in the process, the whaling fleet introduced materials, technology, plants, animals, and diseases into these cultures, which led to profound changes in the cultures and environments they visited.
- In the critical century following America's independence, when scientific institutions were being

founded and U.S. policy was being formed, information and artifacts collected by whalers greatly expanded America's knowledge of the world.

- Whale hunting led to a decline in whale populations worldwide. Some species were endangered as a result of the hunt.
- Whaling had an impact on the American imagination and influenced American literature, painting, fashion, and folk art. In New Bedford the whaling economy financed homes, businesses, and public buildings, and influenced the local architecture and landscape.
- New Bedford today reflects its heritage as the 19th century whaling capital of the world. Many of the communities that participated in the whaling industry continue to contribute to the cultural fabric of the city. The descendants of those who first came to New Bedford aboard local whaleships developed thriving communities, which have grown to become a major cultural and political force in the region.

Appendix B presents a complete narrative description of each theme.

The Alaska Connection

Over the latter half of the 1800s, many New Bedford whaling vessels voyaged to the North Slope of Alaska, often wintering over to await the spring whaling season. Some New Bedford whalers may have settled in Arctic villages, and some North Slope residents trace their ancestry to the "Yankee whalers."

The Iñupiat people were actively recruited as whalers and crews on the boats. The Iñupiat engaged

in active and brisk trade with the whalers and helped supply the fleet with food. Today these people continue to practice subsistence whaling.

The Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, opened in 1999, preserves the language and knowledge of these native people and promotes the collection, preservation, and exhibition of materials significant to their traditional culture and history. The center is legislatively affiliated with New Bedford Whaling NHP. Among its displays is an exhibit produced by the park in collaboration with the New Bedford Whaling Museum and the New Bedford Free Public Library. This inaugural exhibit features photographs and artifacts of reporter Herbert L. Aldrich's 1887 Arctic travels; his photos of the North Slope people were some of the first ever taken.

The park and its partners also provide technical assistance in interpretation and education to the center and work with the center to develop collaborative programs, and the Iñupiat culture is integrated into park themes.

The Underground Railroad

Several structures in New Bedford have been identified as possible safe houses used by escaping slaves on the Underground Railroad. Many of the city's Quaker and free African-American residents were active in the abolitionist movement and are believed to have helped harbor slaves seeking their freedom. A 1998 study suggested a strong relationship between the port of New Bedford and the Underground Railroad. The NPS in Alaska is now investigating possible Underground Railroad connections between New Bedford and northern Alaska.

“In order to preserve for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States as a national historical park, certain districts, structures, and relics located in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and associated with the history of whaling and related social and economic themes in America, there is established the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.”

Public Law 104-333, November 12, 1996